

RELIGION EXPERTS COLUMN

*Below is my response to the question provided for the **Ask The Religion Experts** feature in this Sunday's **Ottawa Citizen**. We hope this will generate thoughtful discussion of real-life applications of Buddhadharma and deeper understanding for us all.*

Sunday, May 13, 2012

Q : Does it bother you more when it is a 'religious' person who behaves improperly?

A : There are different kinds of improper behaviour - illegal, immoral and spiritually harmful, to name a few, and they can often over-lap. For example, where I practice and live we have been shocked and shamed by the conviction of several clergymen for sexual abuse of children. It pains and disgraces all of us, regardless of our faith affiliation, that this could happen in our community. This is especially reprehensible because these criminals used their office, trust and privilege to commit their crimes, and the victims were innocent and vulnerable children. This only multiplies the suffering in the community, the faith community and the community at large.

Those are the clearest and most egregious examples, however, and we should not limit this to such obvious ones, nor to clergy alone. In our congregations we may know of those who are abusing spouses, involved in drug use and trade or employing immoral business practices. If the behaviour is extreme and offensive enough, we have to consider excluding such individuals from our community altogether. For lesser acts, our responsibility is more paradoxical. On the one hand, we must speak out loudly and unequivocally against improper behaviour, and on the other, as members of a congregation, we all share a responsibility to care for our fellow congregants and help them find their way again. These are perhaps the greater challenges to our faith community.

Does it bother you? - this speaks to a my personal distress at such acts. I don't see misdeeds as a failing of religion, mine or anyone's. Buddhists view actions as the burden of that person, and which will impose consequences primarily on the actor. Inasmuch as Buddhists acknowledge the interconnectedness of all beings, we must also find some way to understand how improper behaviours implicate us in suffering in our world. In short, there are no simple or blanket answers. Religious life is by nature a messy one, and we are obliged to muddle through the messiness as best as we can, with the teaching we have. None of us is perfect and our religious task includes dealing with the imperfections of others.

*Rev. Innen Parchelo, doshu,
Red Maple Sangha
:: om namu amida butsu::*

This and all other contributors' responses are available on the Citizen's online blog:

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/life/ask-the-religion-experts/index.html#>

All my past 52 columns are available online at:

<http://www.realperson.com/ARE.htm>

We invite you to consider this response and share your own on our Red Maple Leaflet blog at <http://www.redmaplesangha.blogspot.com>